



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Elections in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 20, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States continues to observe the lead-up to the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan with great interest and concern. To remind us all, in a democratic society it is not just demonstrated freedom and fairness on election day, it is demonstrated freedom and fairness throughout the election process, which includes the lead-up. We share the concerns that Ambassador Pavesi, the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, expressed on October 19. Democratic elections, freedom of media and freedom of assembly, before and after the elections, are critical to the future of Azerbaijan.

We remain troubled by reports of police violence during unauthorized demonstrations in Baku on October 9, as well as by reports that police have detained up to 300 political activists -- including up to 20 candidates -- on October 16 in anticipation of Rasul Guliyev's return. We deeply regret the serious injuries of opposition supporters that occurred in both those incidents at the hands of the police. We urge the Government to hold accountable those who are responsible for these injuries.

Human rights standards prohibit a Government from abridging the right of the people peaceably to assemble. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to show extra creativity and flexibility in finding ways that allow the people to exercise their right in Baku and elsewhere. In this regard, we call on both sides to resume the dialogue that is necessary to achieve this goal.

We thank the OSCE/ODIHR for their second interim report. We share many of their concerns, but want to highlight here evidence that, "some executive authorities are intervening in the campaign in favor of certain candidates and in some cases have interfered with the electoral process."

In his Decree of May 11, President Aliyev made a pledge to the people of Azerbaijan and to the international community that his government would conduct a free and fair election on November 6. We again call on President Aliyev and his government to ensure that all officials throughout the country implement the May Decree and adhere to the word and spirit of OSCE principles for elections that meet international standards. With only three weeks until the elections, we call on all candidates and political parties to engage seriously with the voters in order to gain their trust and support.

We are all very hopeful that Azerbaijan is going to be able to continue to attempt to hold free and fair elections. It is very important for Azerbaijan, it is very important for the international community, and the United States wishes nothing but the greatest success for this country.

Thank you.